

120 Years Of Industry Coverage

In 1890, John C. Freund summed up the purpose of his newly launched publication, *The Music Trades*, writing, “A trade paper is a record of man’s nobler side. It tells the story of his labor, his enterprise, his progress in industry and commerce, and in the arts. The daily paper records his crimes, his failures, his vices, his accidents, and all the corruption of his life.” At that time, the American music industry consisted of several hundred regional piano makers, a handful of artisans turning out wind instruments, and a small group of importers in New York and Boston who sold European-crafted violins, mandolins, and wind instruments. The unforeseen evolution over the subsequent 12 decades stands as a testament to innate human ambition and creativity.

We’ve been privileged to have a ring-side seat to recount the unfolding drama. (The banner on this issue’s cover dates back to the first issue of *The Music Trades*.) Despite the epochal change of the past 120 years, Freund’s original mission remains as valid today as ever, and we continue to chronicle the noble efforts of all those who serve the art of music by creating better products, making them more affordable, and devising ways to distribute them to a broader audience.

We’ve had the privilege to recount the stories of the titans, who by virtue of immense talent and fortuitous circumstances made a lasting mark in the world. People like Thomas Edison, who created recorded music with his talking machine; Laurens Hammond, who harnessed electricity for musical ends with his famous organ; Leo Fender, who popularized the electric guitar; and Bob Moog, who invented the synthesizer. Equally important, we have chronicled the contributions of thousands who, through refinements large and small, have made music more accessible. The forward thinkers who brought steam driven engine technology to the factory floor to make pianos more affordable; the retailers who removed barriers to participation by devising the band instrument rental program; the engineers who applied computer-controlled machinery to improve quality and value; the designers who made digital tuners so accessible that no one has an excuse for being out of tune any longer; and countless others that space precludes listing here. Working independently, and motivated by the straightforward desire to give the customer more, these individuals have significantly improved the human condition. We like to think that the information in our columns has helped them advance the industry.

Despite unending change, there is one overriding constant that runs through our accumulated back issues: namely, failed predictions. Whenever anyone has ventured forth with sweeping forecasts, in almost every case, events have proven them

wrong. Throughout the 1890s there was consensus that local merchants were in imminent danger of being obliterated by the rapid growth of Sears Roebuck. In the ’20s, some of the industry’s best minds were convinced that “active music making,” was destined to disappear because “who would strive to master an instrument, when they can just flip on a radio or player piano.” In the ’30s, during the height of the Depression, the conventional wisdom was that America would never regain its past prosperity, and the industry would continue to shrink. More recently, the growth of digital technology in the ’80s led many to conclude that guitars, drums, and wind instruments were going the way of the dinosaur. We don’t know which current predictions are destined to be debunked,

but we’ll be sure to let you know in a few years. However, here’s one truly bankable forecast that we stand by: Thanks to the inspired creativity of the people who make up our industry, things have consistently worked out better than anyone ever anticipated. Whatever hardships we face today will become a faint memory in a more vibrant future.

The fact that we’re still following John C. Freund’s original mission is due in large part to the continuity of ownership and management at *The Music Trades*. We are respectively the fifth publisher and the fifth editor in the magazine’s 120-year run. Freund was the first to record the industry’s

progress when he initiated this magazine. Our grandfather, John F. Majeski, went to work for *The Music Trades* in 1911 as an assistant bookkeeper and eventually purchased the business in July 1929, months before the stock market crash and the beginning of the Depression. Through sheer tenacity and willpower he sustained the magazine through two decades of economic hardship. Our father, John F. Majeski Jr., took the helm in the early ’50s, enlivening the publication with his forceful intellect and building a loyal readership worldwide. We’ve been privileged to build on these traditions. While we try to serve our readers and the industry by disseminating timely and useful information, our rewards have been disproportionate. We have consistently been humbled and inspired by the talented and dedicated people we cross paths with on a daily basis, and we are privileged to number many of them as friends. It remains an honor to be a part of this dynamic industry.



Paul Majeski and Brian Majeski flank a bust of The Music Trades founder John C. Freund. In the background is a portrait of their grandfather, John F. Majeski, who acquired the publication in 1929.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor

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